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ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

PHILANTHROPIC

AND

DIALECTIC SOCIETIES,

AT

CHAPEL HILL, N. C.

JUNE 26, 1833;

BY THE HON. GEORGE E. BADGER.

RICHMOND:

Printed by Thomas W. White, opposite the Bell Tavern.

.....
1833.



ADDRESS.

Gentlemen of the Philanthropic and Dialectic Societies :

To impart instruction to the young, has, in every age, furnished occupation to those of maturer years ; and every species of writing has been exhausted in precepts to prepare them for the conflict with temptations which await their first entrance upon manhood. The eye of friendly solicitude has anticipated the scene of life—has beheld youth, impetuous with desire, confident of strength, and buoyant with hope, rushing forward upon a path beset with dangers, of which the greatest are unseen, or thoughtlessly despised for their apparent insignificance ; and the lessons of wisdom, taught by experience, have been urged with all the force of argument, and all the fervor of affection—with every variety of illustration, in every tone of remonstrance, which might best serve to arrest attention, and fix, even in the most careless, a sense of approaching danger. That these attempts to prepare others for a struggle, of the nature of which they are ignorant, are worthy of all commendation, we must all concede ; but it may admit of serious question whether they have attained to any great success, either to prevent failure, or to facilitate recovery. It is not perhaps possible so to epitomise for the young man the experience of age, as to send him forth in early wisdom prepared for the trials of life ; and in the art of living, as in every branch of knowledge, observation will justify the conclusion, that abridgments can only afford hints to refresh the recollection of the expert, but will never be able to confer wisdom upon the ignorant. The heaven-inspired promise of perseverance in rectitude, is not made to occasional warning and reproof, however eloquent and earnest, but to that daily instruction which blends knowledge and virtue with the earliest thoughts and associations of the mind, till, in after life, they shall seem instincts of nature rather than habits of education. Yet we are not justified in supposing these occasional efforts to have been entirely without success. On the contrary, they may afford, and probably often have afforded, aid to the daily lessons of the fireside and the scminary—have served by their novelty to awaken an atten-

tion fatigued by sameness of instruction, and by external authority to give strength to domestic admonition. But at this day, the difficulties inherent in every effort thus to speak or thus to write, are increased an hundred fold. The mind of man is still studious of novelty, and pleased with change. But in addresses to the young, where is novelty to be found? Of matter, no where—and amidst all the diversities of illustration, of style, of argument, which the poet and the essayist have successively employed to give variety and impressiveness to lessons of wisdom for youth, where is the man bold enough to expect any novelty, even of manner, in the delivery or enforcement of ancient truths? But something may be hoped of attention, of respect, and of indulgence, for one who does not assume the attitude of a moral dictator, but comes at your own bidding to address you—comes, not only aware of general deficiency, but sensible that circumstances of domestic distraction, have denied him the opportunity to devote entire to your edification, the small space of time which the regular demands of business had left at his disposal—who, under these disadvantages, is sincerely desirous to be useful to you, and to discharge honorably the task which your favorable opinion has assigned him. At all events, whatever difficulties may attend the effort at instruction, I cannot feel justified in omitting the attempt. That the issue of life depends ordinarily upon its commencement, experience teaches; and we know from revelation, that the present life, compared (as it aptly is) for its shortness and uncertainty, to “a vapor which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away,” yet stretches forward its influence into the expanse of eternal existence. No opportunity, therefore, of rightly influencing the outset of life, can be innocently neglected; and we must not for a moment imagine, that we are now assembled for purposes of amusement, or that we can pass from our present meeting without incurring some responsibility for one added opportunity of improvement.

In the first place, then, let me impress upon you, that your collegiate course is but the commencement of education—is intended not so much to make you learned, as to enable you to become so; and that nothing is or can be gained in the few years of residence here, but the rudiments of knowledge. To obtain such an introduction to science as may be afterwards improved into a full acquaintance with her riches, demands all the diligence of the student during a college life; but when a college life is over, to permit these preliminary acquirements to remain unimproved, is

at best, voluntarily to forego your advantages, and ignobly to content yourselves with the lowest station amongst the votaries of science. But this ground even cannot be retained; you must press on or recede. As by a law applicable to the body, new supplies of food and oft repeated application to healthful exercise, are necessary, not merely to its increase but to its existence; so what the mind acquires can only be retained by diligence and improvement; and he who resolves that he will not advance, has already, in effect, taken the first step of retrogradation. Fix it then as certain, that you cannot stand still; and if there be any generous desire of excellency in your bosoms—any sense of duty to your parents or friends—any grateful remembrance of Him who is the ultimate author of all your advantages; resolve, that while literature or science has any thing to be gained without neglecting the duties more immediately yours in active life, you will continue to increase your store.

It has been often remarked by foreigners, and may be easily perceived by ourselves, that, in our country, men are not in any department of society thoroughly made what they assume to be. We seek to do too much in a short time; and yielding to our wishes, without consulting the necessities of things, we affect to become skilled in learning, in science, in the professions, and in the mechanic arts, without that patient application, by which only any thing can be well and thoroughly learned. There are many causes to be found in our situation and institutions, to account for this, but it certainly exists, and as certainly has, in some respects, a mischievous tendency. We are not as literary a people as we should be. We have more smatterers, and fewer adepts, than other nations; and as a necessary consequence of the want of thorough instruction, we are inflated with self consequence at what we deem our vast attainments. How often, my young friends, and how painfully is this manifested in the productions of our public men! What pompous bombast—what unmeaning declamations—what artificial subtleties—what gross invective—what coarse allusions—what disgusting self confidence, deform the oratory (as it is called) of congress! Of all the weeks which are yearly devoted in that body to the delivery of speeches, how few the hours which are not wasted! Of the thousand newspaper columns which are filled with reports of these speeches, how many can a man of taste read without disgust, or a patriot without sorrow! Attend our judicial tribunals, and see how the gravity of jurisprudence is insulted by the same frothy, loud, inelegant,

and unintelligible vociferations—observe how often even the most ordinary proprieties of language, the most common rules of grammar, are violated—so often and so grossly indeed, as to leave no doubt that the violations proceed from ignorance rather than inattention—yet, scarce a public meeting is held (and when and where are they not held?) from an assembly at Faneuil Hall, to a separate election or a barbecue, which is not, according to the printed reports of those who heard and acted in them, enlightened and electrified by eloquence surpassing that of Tully or Demosthenes! In short, deficient as we are, all our people are prodigies—learning is to be found in every hamlet, literature in every country store, and oratory in every debating room. In the mean time, there is nothing in the public taste and intelligence, to rebuke and put to shame, this empty swelling, this “sound and fury signifying nothing.” Those who see and lament the evil are not of sufficient number or authority to control public opinion. The people at large are pleased with the speakers and writers, who, if intelligible in nothing else, are sufficiently so in the descriptions of idolatrous worship to the intelligence and virtue of the people, and in public professions of their own disinterested devotion to the general welfare. In this state of things, it will require no small effort in a young man, on his entrance into life, to continue a due attention to literature, to persevere amidst the pleasures and the engagements which surround him, in preserving what he has already attained, and still, as opportunities occur, adding to his stock. He sees the highest stations attainable and attained, not only without learning, but with little sense; and, sickening at the irksomeness of study without reward, is apt to exclaim, why should I not content myself with that mediocrity of attainment, by which, with confidence and vociferation, so many have succeeded, and which seems the surest, as it is the easiest, mode of advancement? To this inquiry, it may be answered, that knowledge is of itself desirable, and should be pursued even for its own sake—for the dignity and happiness which it brings to its possessor; that though many succeed in acquiring fame and opulence without classical attainments, yet these offer no hindrance to the acquisition of either; and it is not recommended that they be pursued in exclusion of, but in connexion with, and as auxiliary to, the practical employments of life. In these, you should be desirous (as what youth of noble aspirings is not) to do well whatever you do, so that with the applause of those who may be able to advance you, you may have in your favor the sentence of

all whose worth and intelligence make their approbation a gratifying assurance of kindred excellence in yourselves. But we have proof by example, that though the highest accomplishments of literature may not conduce to a speedy elevation in the political world, or win the noisy plaudits of the crowd; yet they do lend an ultimate and irresistible weight to genius and learning, and command for their possessor a noble and enduring superiority. Of this, no more conspicuous instance can be produced than the distinguished gentleman* who addressed you at the last commencement. He, amidst all the occupations of private, professional and public life, has ever remembered the pursuits of his *alma mater*; has kept bright by constant exercise, all the mental armoury which early education had bestowed, and, instead of suffering his classical knowledge to decay, has been always enlarging his acquirements: and he now reaps the reward of his early labors and consistent efforts in a real efficiency, an acknowledged superiority—of which, any of us, my friends, might well be proud. When, therefore, you shall be tempted to self-indulgence, and see men, by art or fortune, rising into premature elevation without classical learning,—when you shall see men of real abilities, worth and usefulness, justly honored, though without these literary embellishments,—be not led to conclude them valueless. While you learn to think them not indispensable either to merit or success, at the same time remember that literature gives to professional talent all its elegance and half its efficiency; and that to emulate the fame and reach the eminence of the gentleman to whom I have just alluded, you must be not only profound in your acquirements, but various, acute and graceful.

The evils of an imperfect education to a professional man, none can know but he who has felt them. In the legal profession, how often is the careless student reminded of his deficiencies? How much gracefulness of allusion—how much power of argument—how much felicity of illustration are lost to him! how he longs to be able to call up and give distinctness to recollections which yet elude him, and how bitterly he laments over the early indolence which condemns him to mediocrity, and feels that his powers have never been developed, and that he will never be what he might and ought to have been, either in reputation or desert! Let not these repinings ever be yours. Now, you hold your own destiny—now,

* *William Gaston, Esquire, of Newbern.*

the opportunities of excellence are all in possession or in prospect. You may either improve or neglect them—make them means of usefulness, or memorials of criminal indifference and neglect. Do not hesitate; much often depends upon the resolutions of a moment: resolve, *now*, that you will be learned, accomplished, literary—that you will not be content while you still have something useful to acquire, and that no allurements of pleasure, no love of ease, no indolence, shall ever induce you to lose the advantage of your opportunities, either by negligence of study now, or inattention to learning hereafter. There is another consideration which should urge upon you this resolution. If the day of florid bombast and coarse abuse is ever to give way to the reign of chaste and dignified eloquence—if the literary taste of the country generally is ever to be improved, this must be accomplished by the united influence of the educated classes; and by them it can only be accomplished by the study of classical antiquity, and the best specimens of modern literature—by diligence to gain, and care to retain knowledge—by assiduous efforts to do every thing in the best manner, and a steady resolution to discountenance empty pretensions, and to encourage real merit. By these means, an influence may go forth upon the people which shall elevate the national taste, and by establishing a higher standard of excellence, dismiss to obscurity those who have not ability to be useful, and compel to its improvement those who have. You, gentlemen, form a portion of that literary class, and your efforts may be felt throughout the union, if met by corresponding efforts from other quarters, and upon this State may have a most salutary effect, even without such co-operation. Let me, then, entreat you, by all these considerations united, to resolve upon a thorough education; to believe and feel, that to neglect here any one opportunity of gaining knowledge, is sin against yourselves and your country; and that after you shall have left this seminary, to sit down in contented mediocrity—to make no improvement of your modicum of learning—to be at the beginning of life but half scholars, and daily to become less, will be, at once, a mean desertion of duty, and a voluntary indifference to true glory.

The resolute pursuit of study which I have thus recommended, will strongly tend to repress that self conceit, which upon small attainments is apt to rise in the mind, and to substitute that true modesty which is generally the companion of large acquirements in solid learning. It has been sometimes made a question, whether to think too little or too much

of ourselves, be the preferable error; and it has been determined, I think upon just grounds, that vanity is to be preferred to despondency. By study, both these errors will be prevented or overcome, and we shall soon be enabled (which all admit to be best) to think of ourselves justly. It is the sense of vast present possessions that tends to vanity; it is the fear of want of capacity for acquiring, that produces despondency: You will be guarded against both, by a just estimate of yourselves. Your actual, will always be small in comparison with your possible, attainments: you will always, in fact, know less than you might and ought to know; less than many others have attained without your advantages: and this duly considered, will make you modest. On the other hand, the more you try your powers, the more you will be assured that nature deals liberally with men; that, in general, aside from some peculiar developements for which a natural aptitude or tact is demanded, all in itself desirable, may be attained by industry. Your approach to men of eminence whom you may have regarded at a distance with awe, will shew you the original equality; and, though you may be at times oppressed at an amount of acquisition, which will to you appear great, you will soon find it to be an acquisition arising from no innate superiority, but carefully collected by little and little, and by the same process equally attainable by yourselves. When we see a young man inflated with a sense of his great attainments, or presuming upon a genius which renders effort to him unnecessary—urging himself forward with placid self-complacency—imagining himself the object of universal approbation, while in truth, he is provoking the scorn of the wise, and touching the pity of the good—we have no difficulty in assigning his vanity to self-ignorance. And so, when a young man is appalled at what is before him, and despairs of ever attaining to excellence or distinction, we may with equal certainty trace his want of confidence to want of knowledge of himself. By a correct estimate of yourselves, you will learn a modesty which must keep you from presumption, and a confidence which will ever preserve you from despair. Believe that by industry and perseverance you can do all things, and you will accomplish much: but feel not elated at what you can do—for the capacity is a gift, and can in no sort be meritorious; its improvement only, is a just foundation of self-complacency. To be able to do, is to this purpose nothing; to do, is every thing. Deficiency in itself is misfortune only, but accompanied with genius,

becomes crime; and yet, nothing is more common, than to find the mind inflated with self-consequence at the possession of powers unimproved, and though voluntarily condemned to obscurity and uselessness, yet filled with visions of possible importance and imaginary glory. Distinction founded on worth, must ever be the result of exertion; and by a process, beautiful as it is useful, distinction thus acquired, fills the possessor with modest conceptions of himself. Of this, the most instructive and illustrious example is found in the great Newton. After all those mighty discoveries, which enlightened and astonished mankind, and while to others he appeared the intellectual prodigy of the universe,—to himself he seemed but to have sported on the shore of knowledge, and to have left the boundless ocean itself not only unexplored but unattempted. Such must ever be the result of genuine devotion to science; and if, my young friends, you shall find, during your collegiate course, or in after life, any risings of vanity at your powers and attainments, let the remembrance of Newton, rebuke into just insignificance, every effort of self-exultation.

But you are under yet higher obligations to preserve and enlarge your literary acquirements—to learn every thing which may add strength to the reasoning powers, and grace and attractiveness to style and delivery. The present is, every where, and no where more than in our own country, a peculiar era. The press is just beginning fully to develope its mighty influence on our nation. Science, no longer confined in solid volumes to well stored libraries, or making quarterly visits in the thick pamphlets of learned criticism, now condescends to speak in weekly and even daily sheets; and thus addresses herself to large masses of men heretofore beyond her reach. Literature, religion, science, have now, like politics, seized upon the daily press; and taste, doctrine and knowledge, are urged upon the world in ever multiplying periodicals. What is to be the ultimate effect of this new direction given to the march of mind—whether this fecundity of the press, this stripping off the dignity of learning, and letting down science to the level of a penny paper, will not issue in a serious injury to society—it is not necessary to inquire. It has been thought by intelligent and observing men, that the certain, if not the first effect of this state of things, will be, to lessen the standard of writing abilities—to put in request a tact for writing acceptably, rather than writing well,—for the pleasant and superficial, rather than the labo-

rious and profound ; and thus, in the next generation, to fill the world with ignorant pretenders, who will sip from the surface, but drink not from the fountain of knowledge : that deep learning, being no longer in demand, will shrink into obscurity. There are others, however, who seem to think, that provided many read, it is no matter what--that if all know many things, it is an important gain, though none know any thing well : and they are pleased, of course, with the prospect of a general diffusion, even of horn book sciencee. But, whatever may be the effect of this rage for books in the literary departments, no man of even moderate intelligence, can doubt as to the mischievous effects already produced, now producing, and in fearful prospect of being produced, by the political press. In the party conflicts of the day, a spirit of falsehood, of defamation, of indecent scurrility, and shameful corruption, has gone forth upon the editorial corps. Once, men were divided on matters of principle, or what were supposed matters of principle : papers on different sides might be relied upon, as presenting the views of intelligent portions of our public men ; and if facts were disputed, there was an attempt to reach the truth, or at least a decent pretension to it. But now, every thing seems reduced to a mere scramble for emolument : the credulity of the people has been so often practised upon with success, that scarce any care is used to conceal the artifice of deception from the purblindness of the public : and it is lamentable to remark, that even the moral sense of the community has become corrupt and vitiated, and defamation the most atrocious, is sure to obtain toleration, if not approval. Meantime, a spirit of insubordination is by some openly taught and recommended ; and passion, and interest, and prejudice, are appealed to, in order to raise discontent, and produce opposition against the laws. It is not necessary to be more specific : facts are too recent and too appalling. But, does not this state of things call upon you for increased diligence to qualify yourselves for rendering effectual service to your country ? If public taste, much more public morals, require for their reformation, the exertions of the enlightened and virtuous, the delusions that have gone abroad must be met and dissipated ; the press must be corrected ; it must be transferred to the direction of able and upright men : and the people (though well meaning, yet easily misled,) must be guarded against those artifices, by which it is sought to array them against their own peace and happiness, and to involve them in the stupendous guilt and folly of pros-

trating the last structure, which can be raised by man for the preservation of equal rights by republican institutions. But to do this, you must yourselves be enlightened; you must be no novices: your reasoning powers must be perfected in strength and dexterity, by constant and healthful exercise: your minds must be stored with every variety of knowledge, to instruct or to please. And thus prepared, you must bear in mind your high duties, and the large destinies which may be influenced by your exertions: you must be the true friends of the people; teaching them to see and to despise the efforts of those who would mislead them—you must be prepared, should circumstances require, to strip the mask of patriotism from ambition, and show his horrid features to the detestation of mankind; and to teach, both by your example and your precepts, a voluntary, steady, and universal submission to the laws. It is certain, that the talents of a country, if generally united in one purpose, will bend public opinion to it, be it good or evil; that through the press, talents must operate on public opinion; and that, therefore, society has a deep interest in the maintenance of a body of intelligent and honest writers. They stand, in truth, as sentinels on the walls of liberty, and give an alarm at the approach of danger, and only at its approach. The profligacy or inadequacy of a large majority of the conductors of the press, is evident to all who look into the daily news; and it cannot admit of doubt, that much of public evil may be traced to this cause. Until men of standing and literature, in considerable numbers, shall devote themselves to the press, and all shall become, as emergency requires, occasional contributors, the evil must be endured. But why should it be so? The press is the most important means of influencing opinion in a country where opinion is irresistible: why, then, should this mighty power be allowed, without a struggle, to fall into hands generally inadequate in ability, or disqualified by corruption? Let these things have their due weight, and the next generation may see a mighty change accomplished.

But, in order to this result, each one must realize that he has something himself to do, and must resolve to do it. He must feel, that upon him individually, rests a portion of the duty of arresting false opinions, and counteracting practices injurious in their tendency, whether they be the result of wicked or of mistaken designs. He must be prepared at all times, and in all situations, to maintain the cause of truth, order and

happiness, against every opposer. He will find, in the same ranks, men of genius urging on the cause of disaffection ; some careless, and some mistaken, in respect to their country's good ; and some, alas ! desperately bent upon commotion, and resolute for mischief : he will find men of the most amiable tempers and sound morals, seduced from their natural station on the side of true liberty and glory, and pursuing some deceitful phantom in their stead : intimate friends, the associates of youthful days or early manhood, may thus separate between his soul and themselves. What is to be done ? Shall he hesitate in his course, while he sees them urging (from whatever motives) a cause adverse to all government ? a cause which resolves itself, despite of all its nice and unintelligible distinctions, into a complete overthrow of the public will, and the substitution of the very elements of confusion and anarchy. While he sees these things, can a friend to his country and to truth hesitate in his course ? He cannot. When genius, by its fascinations, misleads even good sense and sound morals into disorganization, the danger becomes urgent, and demands the more vigorous interference for public preservation. You must feel yourselves, gentlemen, by your position and political privileges, called always to battle for sound doctrine. Your good sense, if plainly exercised, will teach you that no doctrine can be sound, which does not lead to wholesome practice ; no government free, which is liable to dictation ; and no people long happy, who are led by demagogues. And you will have no great difficulty in determining, that those, whose declared and written opinions, uttered with all the fire of eloquence, and the solemnity of apparent sincerity, may be found on every side of most important questions, who have acted as if all power in their own hands was rightful—in the hands of others, usurpation ; who, in the midst of these suspicious contradictions in conduct and opinion, have ever confidently demanded the support of the nation, and have not hesitated to-day to ask assent to positions directly opposite to others as strenuously maintained yesterday : you will, I say, easily determine, that such men, if not very unfaithful, are at least very incompetent guides, and deny them your confidence. You will readily understand, when questions arise upon the meaning of the fundamental law, that the sense put upon it from the commencement of its operation—a sense for years unquestioned—never questioned but by excited or interested portions of the people—and uniting in its support the clear and concurring judgment of

the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary of the union—you will readily perceive, that this exposition (whatever it be) so sanctioned by opinion and practice, must be the true one, or else that all attempts at exposition are vain, and society must be dissolved. Nor will you be misled by subtle doctrines, couched in language unusual and unintelligible to plain men—which no one can explain, however he may affect to understand ; and you will firmly repel every effort to arm you, upon no better foundation than vociferation and paradox, against the ordinary laws and judges of property. Despite of these and other arts, you will hold fast your integrity ; you will realize, that peace, domestic tranquillity, and regular tribunals to administer laws, are objects of great value, however underrated they may be,—that it is quite possible for a people not to be prosperous and happy, though blessed with ceaseless agitation ; that mobs may err in opinion and in practice ; and that those who most loudly urge internal dissension, are often men to whom any change will be desirable ; and therefore, you will be always found on the side of the laws and the constitution. The jargon, indeed, by which it is attempted to transfer to politics the impracticable speculations of the most abstruse portions of metaphysics, can be only exceeded in folly, by the pompous political declamations, the solemn processions, and the oratory of the human race, which marked the first French revolution : and from considering that era, you may learn a useful lesson—that, when the order of society is broken up, and men are forced out of that sphere of daily duties for which providence designed them, sententious morality, however lofty, is no security against crime ; and that there is but one step, and that a short one, between theoretical absurdity, and the practical cruelty of the mob.

With the opinions which I entertain, I cannot conclude this address without calling your attention to another subject, which, as it is the most important to you, ought not from any deference to the caprice of fashion, to be omitted here. I wish to urge upon your consideration, the claims of the Christian Revelation. Unless grounded upon this, every system for the government of life must not only be incomplete but radically defective. It is this only which gathers into one, and invigorates with the energy of a single controlling motive, all the detached rules of conduct, and gives harmony, strength and beauty, to the whole. That you should in theory reject it, or even be skeptical touching the truth of christianity,

is not readily to be supposed. Such a state of mind, if it exist, is probably no more than a youthful vanity of opposition; and yet it is dangerous, and ought not to be indulged. Opinions, for whatever purpose assumed, when often expressed, acquire a certain influence over the mind; and when supported with the zeal and animation of frequent controversy, although at first solely to signalize dexterity in argument, at last grow into a habit of thought nearly akin in its effects to actual belief. At all events, the sacrifice of sincerity to a love of display or desire of triumph, cannot but have an unhappy effect upon the character—diminishing the regard for truth, and the ability to discern it. But the rejection of christianity, or even scepticism concerning it, can be only the result of want of consideration. Let me, then, urge upon you, a diligent examination of the grounds of our faith. It fears, it need fear, no examination, however strict, which is full, fair and intelligent. Such an examination, it is not too much to say, will result in entire conviction. But those who reject, do not generally examine; or, if any examination be made, it is after the rejection, and chiefly with a view to confirm the previous decision. To men unaccustomed to investigation, and either obliged by incapacity, or inclined by indolence, to take their opinions from others, such conduct may be natural; but the great principle of true philosophy is to submit to reason, to subject every matter to careful inquiry, and to judge of every fact by its proper evidence. Had this rule of good sense, adopted in every other department of science, been applied to christianity (as in all fairness it ought) universal faith must have been the consequence. But it is much easier to cavil than to reason; a laborious deduction from particulars, though a sure, is a slow process for the discovery of truth; and hence a ready and compendious method has been adopted, to dispose of christianity, without the trouble to investigate its evidence or consider its claims. Arguments *a priori* (if arguments they may be called) have been brought forward; ingenious criticism, superficial learning, and above all, delicate ridicule for the refined, and coarse ribaldry for the vulgar, have been made the means to unsettle the faith of men capable of better things; while, all along, the question of christianity, as a question of fact to be tried by a fair and dispassionate examination of its proofs, has been overlooked or forgotten. Hence, at times, it has been fashionable to speak, or at least to think, of our religion, as the fit solace of old wives and ignorant mechanics, but

little worthy the attention of the learned and polite. Hence, with too many, it has become fashionable to reject this religion: a religion, which, for eighteen hundred years, has exercised a controlling influence over the affairs of mankind; which, with all the evils made to accompany it, by the vice and folly of its professed votaries, has, by its own energy, elevated the character of man wherever it has come; which has subdued the violence, enlarged the benevolence, and increased the happiness, of the human race; which has numbered amongst its friends and supporters, those most distinguished for high mental endowments; and which proves itself worthy of all acceptation, by the pure and elevated morality it teaches—a morality, which, though often sought for, the wit of man could never discover, and yet, when disclosed, is found to be so exactly adapted to the wants of our race, that we wonder it was not discovered by the first seeker—a morality, which no man can fail to perceive, if universally practised, would at once banish moral evil from the world, render physical evil inconsiderable, and restore the golden age of virtue and happiness to mankind. A religion, so ancient and so beneficially influential, so attested and so recommended, is not, without great folly and guilt, to be rejected without inquiry: with inquiry there is little fear of its rejection. Let it be tried either by its external proofs, its internal character, or the number and value of the testimonies to its truth; and it will manifest its title to a heavenly origin. You would feel ashamed, that any department of science were entirely unknown to you, and would blush to own, that on a literary question of mere curiosity, you had rejected, or adopted, any hypothesis without examination. How then can you be justified in a neglect of this inquiry? It has every thing to rouse a generous curiosity, to excite a deep interest, to occupy a capacious intellect.

No man who thinks, can fail to observe much in the scene of things around him, to produce uncertainty and disquietude. Upon the stage of life, men appear and disappear, with little apparent reason for their coming or departure, beyond the continuance of a species, for whose continuance no sufficient motive seems to exist. We find ourselves hastening on, like others who have preceded us, full of hopes, eager with desires of distinction and happiness, and with an ever increasing ratio of rapidity, rushing through the brief journey of life. Meantime, we are surrounded by a world containing almost infinite subjects for speculation

and inquiry ; within, we are conscious of powers to explore it--of a desire of knowledge, to prompt to the research ; and we see in it the occupation for many ages of all our capacities. Yet our existence here is so short, and even that short period is so distracted by the necessary demands of our animal nature, that the whole seems incongruous--seems designed to disappoint this natural desire of knowledge, and to render fruitless those vast powers of attainment. What, then, is this death, in which our share in this great universe seems so soon to terminate ? does it indeed annul our powers, and send them in the very infancy of their existence, into annihilation ? or does it only transfer us to other scenes, where, in some other modification, these powers are to exist, and find employment ? If so, where ? and how ? In these inquiries, when truly made, the heart is not only interested, but anxious. A consciousness of ill-desert will arise upon our thoughts, and we tremble to commit ourselves to Him, who, we feel, has a power which none can control--a rightful authority which none can call in question. Upon what principles, we ask, will he exert his power ? what is his character and disposition ? Can we trace these in his works ? Has he made any disclosure of them for our information ? These inquiries of an anxious being, the christian religion assumes to solve. She announces herself as a messenger from Heaven--she declares that you are immortal, and offers to you information of the means by which that immortality may be rendered virtuous and happy. She promises, upon the authority of Heaven, to remove your fears most reasonably excited by a just sense of delinquency ; to "confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and to bring you to everlasting life." Sanctioned as her pretensions are, they surely deserve investigation. He who should refuse to examine the grounds on which the Newtonian system of the universe depends, and persist in the belief that the earth is a stationary plain, and the sun a daily traveller over its surface, would justly be considered irrational and absurd ; yet he who rejects christianity without inquiry, is a madman, compared with whom the other may be considered discreet and sober. The former rejects indeed a theory of the universe, established to all intelligent inquirers upon sure demonstration : but it is to him of little importance : his virtue and happiness, here and hereafter, may be effectually secured without the discovery or belief of this system. The latter, having every thing at hazard, madly resolves to take no step for

securing it; and when the truth or falsehood of this religion involves such tremendous consequences, that all other truths sink into insignificance, he devotes his whole attention to the latter, and declines an exertion to satisfy himself of that on which his all may absolutely depend. One thing is clear, the man who adopts this conduct has little claim to the character of a philosopher.

If, then, this inquiry has not already been made, with the zeal and diligence which its importance demands, let it now be commenced, and daily prosecuted to its termination: for he who has not settled this question for himself, is not prepared either to live or die. Be not deceived by any notion that your present existence being indefinite, the inquiry may be safely postponed. If you were certain of life (a certainty which cannot be obtained) the postponement would little correspond with the dictates of wisdom. It is evident, that those things which are most important, should be first attended to—besides, in this case, the present is of all seasons the most desirable for prosecuting such an inquiry. When you shall be immersed in business, or devoted to pleasure, neither the opportunity nor desire will often recur, and but still more rarely, both together; and it should be remembered, that it is an inquiry for which time and thought and leisure are necessary; and how shall these be commanded amidst the bustle of active life? Act, then, with your wonted intelligence, and now commence, and vigorously pursue this most interesting investigation. It is a noble one; it has already occupied the powers, and expanded the understandings of those who, in moral and physical science, are your teachers, and the teachers of the world, and with whom, it is no disparagement to scepticism to say, the most elevated of *her* votaries cannot compare. How absurd, how preposterous, then, that the young, the ignorant and the profane, should presume to overlook, or contemn as unworthy to engage their attention, that science which the world's masters in knowledge loved to explore and honor, from whose pages they drew the choicest intellectual treasures, and by whose precepts they sought for purity of principle, and correctness of life and manners! To such a puerile conceit, such a miserable affectation, such a base degradation of intellect, I flatter myself no one here will descend.

But it is not sufficient, that its proofs should be examined, and its truth upon enlightened conviction admitted—christianity requires the surren-

der of ourselves to its authority. The mere belief of its facts, however clear and well grounded, is nothing, if that belief remain a mere barren proposition in the understanding ; a speculation only of the intellectual man, arranged in the mind with other truths of science. To such a destination christianity cannot submit: her heavenly origin gives her the right to demand a loftier place, a profounder homage. You must realize that the system of our religion immediately concerns yourselves ; that its teachings, reproofs, warnings and commands, are directed to each one of you ; and that, as truly as if the volume containing them, were directly addressed to him by name. Your belief must be operative and influential—must tend towards the heart, and incline you to regulate your life by its precepts ; otherwise, its truths will no more affect favorably your condition, than those of Algebra or Geology.

I fear, my young friends, there is something nearly akin to shame associated with the thought of thus acknowledging christianity ; and though you are willing, from whatever motive, to pay a decent external homage to a religion professed by your countrymen, yet it is with a sort of protestation, generally understood, sometimes even expressed, against its being supposed that you take any serious interest in its doctrines or its precepts. I fear, that you would look upon the imputation to you of serious piety, as a reproach, and the destination to be a christian, as a punishment ; while you still intend, when you leave the world, in some way by no means accurately understood, because but slightly considered, to be saved by the Christian's God ; to be acknowledged at your utmost need by him, of whom, throughout life, you were in truth ashamed. My friends, if there be indeed any such feeling at your hearts, pluck the base thought away, and remember that this faith holds out promises, not to modes of dying, but solely to modes of life ; that you must, *now*, accept or reject it, with all the consequences which Heaven has authoritatively annexed to your determination. Accept, I beseech you, that religion ; and now, even now, begin to frame your lives by its precepts. It will exert a salutary influence over the whole moral character ; what is good will be confirmed ; what weak, strengthened ; what evil, corrected ; what defective, supplied : and you will find yourselves thoroughly furnished to every good word and work.

The duty of gaining here, and improving in after life, the rudiments of knowledge, which I have, upon inferior motives, set before you, will,

under the teaching of religion, assume its true character of higher consequence. You will see, in your present opportunities, the gifts of a great benefactor, who, as a judge, will require an account of his benefactions, and with the most evident equity, demand improvement in proportion to your talents ; who, while he graciously considers every benefit conferred upon your fellows by your agency, as conferred upon himself, will likewise consider a disregard of what you owe to yourselves, to your country, to your friends, as ingratitude for his kindness, and contempt of his authority,—and will punish it accordingly.

Christianity will step in and shed her influence over your duties as citizens ; she will teach you submission to the powers that be, not from the fear of present punishment, or hope of temporal reward, but because those powers are ordained of Heaven. Should you, at any period of political agitation, be pressed with ingenious disquisitions which you may not be able to disentangle and refute, you will inquire to what course of conduct these disquisitions are intended to prompt you ; and if you find the issue will probably be either an idle gasconade, or armed resistance to the laws, you will ask yourselves, in what part of your religion is found the command, or the permission, thus to threaten or resist the government of your country ? Should you be taunted with your obedience as a degrading submission, you will reflect, that obedience is not dictated in particular to man, but is the necessary condition of every virtuous creature in the universe ; that universal good can only be secured by a voluntary submission to every appointment of HIM who comprehends all events by his foresight, provides for all by his wisdom, and brings to pass what he determines by a power which cannot be resisted ; that no such thing as a right of capricious action can exist in the universe ; that those, everywhere, who command others, if virtuous, do, in the command itself, but themselves obey—that he that saith to one “ go and he goeth, and to another come and he cometh, and to a third do this and he doeth it,” is himself, in all this, “ a man under authority”—that the commencement of sin is the first omission to obey ; and that, wherever we are and whatever we do, whether we dispose of our goods or our time, or receive or give, or repose or labor, or live or die, we are pursued by our Creator with the irresistible claims of a rightful authority. These reflections will not only put to flight this suggestion of disgrace : they will do more ; they will teach you the honor of obedience. Raising your contempla-

tions upwards, you will perceive myriads of intelligent beings of diversified gifts and attainments—all happy and glorious, and possessing this character solely from the principle of unlimited obedience—and you will see it as a necessary truth, that this happiness and glory must cease with this obedience. Your hearts will glow, while you contemplate this glorious assemblage continually tending, in moral and intellectual beauty, towards that infinite perfection, which they cannot either reach or approach unto, brightening more and more throughout the ages of eternity with ever increasing splendor and virtue ; while, immeasurably above them, remains forever the eternal source of glory and happiness, shedding abroad of its fulness upon the universe, and springing up in them to eternal life.

If these thoughts were often in our minds, and had a resting place in our hearts, how would our pride be rebuked, that fruitful source of all our ills ! We should feel, that obedience only is suitable and safe for us—we should desire to obey, and when the heart is once engaged in behalf of duty, cavils have lost their power.

Under the influence of this principle, you will commence the course of obedience and true honor, here, in your days of pupilage. You will be punctual in your observance of every regulation of the college, every injunction of your directors—nothing will be too difficult to be performed, nothing so minute as to be forgotten. This noble habit you will carry with you into the active business of life. There you will daily learn wisdom and practise virtue—will both adorn and dignify every relation you may bear in public and domestic life ; and death will only transfer you to a higher scene, where the virtuous principles, the cultivation of which will have been here commenced, shall be prosecuted with nobler powers and complete success, and where the day of eternity shall see you at once glorious and humble, obedient and happy forever.



